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THE PERSIAN QUEEN.

A DRAMA  
  
IN FIVE ACTS,

BY  
  
REV. JOHN P. BRENNAN.

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McNALLY BROS.  
GENERAL AGENTS,  
YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO.



JAN 31 1898

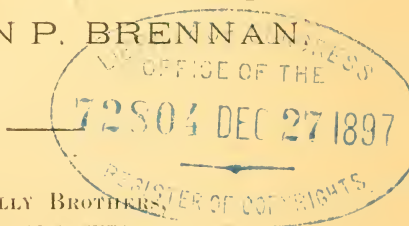
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THE GREENWOOD SCHOOL SUPPLY CO. PRINT.



YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO.

25-10-1-4

## WITH REGARD TO COSTUME.

The scene of the drama is laid in Susan of the Persian empire, in the fifth century before Christ. Assuerus wears a purple robe edged with gold, with flowing sleeves, and confined at the waist by a broad girdle. This is the *candys*, or Median garment. Underneath is worn a tunic, also of purple, but striped with white, and reaching to the knees. The trousers are of crimson, while the high shoes are of saffron hue, tapering at the toe in Median fashion. The *kitaris*, or headdress of the monarch is distinctive. It is a tall stiff cap of bright color, flat at the top, and surrounded at the bottom by a fillet spotted with white on a blue field. For stage purposes the conventional oriental crown will doubtless prove more acceptable. The sceptre is a plain rod, about five feet in length, and ornamented at its upper end with a knob, or ball.

Esther is clad at first in the simple dress of a Jewish maiden; then in the robes of royalty and wearing a tiara, or royal headdress of Persia; again, in sackcloth during her season of penance.

The nobles and courtiers are attired similar to the king, excepting the royal cap. Their headdress is the low cap, or simply the fillet.

Mardochai wears at first the plain garb of a private citizen; later on he is robed as a Persian prince.

Zethar may be distinguished by a red cap without the fillet, and by a sleeveless gown.

Appropriate costumes for the remaining, as well

as the minor characters, will readily suggest themselves.

With regard to court etiquette, two points may be noted: Upon entering the royal presence, prostration—the attitude of worship—was required of all. This may be sufficiently indicated on the stage by bending low the head, and bringing the outstretched arms together, so that the hands are horizontally in line with the head. While royal audience is given, the hands are concealed in the flowing sleeves. This may be the posture when the sense of the lines permit.



## CAST OF CHARACTERS.

ASSUERUS		King of Persia
ESTHER		Queen of Persia
HAMAN		A Princely Favorite
MARDOCHAI		Uncle to Esther
ZARES		Wife of Haman
ZETHAR		Court Jester
THAMAR,	}	Maids of Honor
ADELAIE,		
MAHALON,		
DEBBORA,		
ADMATHA,	/	Persian Princes
CHARSENA,	\	
MAUMAN,	}	Courtiers
BAZATH,		
HARBONA,		
BOGATHAN,	/	Conspirators
THARES,	\	
ATHACH		Servant to the Queen
CHARCAS,	/	Scribes
ABGATHA,	\	
THARSIS,	}	Nobles
MARES,		
MARSANA,		
MAMUCHAN,		
VAGAO,		

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1897.

# Esther; the Persian Queen.

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## ACT I.

### SCENE I.

House of Mardochai, simply furnished. Mardochai reclining on a couch. Enter Esther; Mardochai rises slowly.

ESTHER.

What! uncle dear, yet sleepest thou? behold  
The regal sun is sweeping high upon  
His course to faroff Israel. Ah, me!  
Thou dreamest still of Juda's balmy plains,  
Her wooded hills and many winding streams.  
Alas, dear uncle, we are captives, but  
Yet faithful to the Lord, our God,  
Who holdeth us with loving clasp within  
The hollow of His hand.

MARDOCHAI.

Dear Esther, thou  
Art ever cheering to old Mardochai.  
The Lord hath made thy presenee like unto  
A healthful spring that warmeth e'en  
The wintry blood of age. Aye, thou didst speak  
Of dreams: methought I was awake and saw  
A vision passing strange.

ESTHER.

A vision? what  
Did it portend?

MARDOCHAI.

I know not, Esther, for  
It seemed to me that there were voices loud

And harsh upon the earth, and tumults that  
Did speak of blood. Dread thunders rolled adown  
The vault of heaven, and the timid earth  
Did quake in fear, while every element  
That nature claims, forsook its destined course ;  
And then, behold, two dragons came from out  
The wreck of earth to meet in mortal strife ;  
Like pits of fire their eyes flashed forth a flame  
That none could see and live ; their horrid mouths  
Distended, bared such rows of monstrous teeth  
With sharpened tips, as likened them to lines  
Of Persian spears ; their giant limbs seemed scarce  
To find fit resting place on earth.

ESTHER.

In truth,  
A dreadful vision ! canst thou say what then  
Befel ?

MARDOCHAI.

The dragons cried, and such a cry  
May mortal ears ne'er hear, so anguished was  
The cry, and at the sound all nations leagued  
To war against the just. The wreck of earth  
Was moved again, and days of darkness came  
With danger and distress, while nameless fear  
Encompassed all ; the just prepared for death.  
But as they prayed, a tiny stream grew fast  
Into a mighty flood, abounding far  
In many waters ; then the sun uprose  
With gladsome rays, and filled the world with light ;  
The humble were exalted, and devoured  
In might, the haughty of the land.

ESTHER.

Most strange !

The Lord our God hath spoken in this wise  
To warn His people of impending doom.

MARDOCHAI.

'Tis that I fear; my heart is sick with dread.  
But, hark! the trumpet sounds. (*Trumpet is heard.*)

ESTHER.

Ho, Thamar, quick  
Come hither. (*Enter Thamar.*)

What hath caused this loud uproar  
In Susan's peaceful mart?

THAMAR.

Fair mistress, 't is  
The herald's blast to summon all unto  
Our great king's royal feast. The palace grounds  
Are richly decked with silks and cloth of gold.  
All Susan will attend.

MARDOCHAI.

Not all, not all,  
Poor Thamar; few of Susan will partake  
Of Persia's sumptuous feast. (*Trumpet sounds.*)

Again the blare  
Of noisy trumpets and the thund'rous shout  
Of thousands! can this be the vision's end?  
Doth Persia's feast begin anew our woe?  
Is Juda to endure another scourge  
Than chains and exile? Thrice unhappy race,  
Thou hast abandoned God, and in His wrath  
He hath abandoned thee, first, to thyself,  
And then, to wicked men!

ESTHER.

Nay, uncle dear,  
Invoke not sorrow till it come at God's

Behest; nor picture evil for the just  
Of Israel. Arouse thy drooping heart,  
And look with steadfast eye upon the throne  
Of our true king, the Lord, Who loveth best  
The souls He most chastiseth.

THAMAR.

Master, go  
We not to join the throng before the gates  
Of mighty Assuerus?

MARDOCHAI.

Peace, I pray  
Thee, Thamar; turn away thine eyes from pomp  
That flattereth the pride of man, and pay  
Thy deepest homage to the Lord alone.  
I will not hence.

ESTHER.

We shall but mingle with  
The joyous multitude. Give over grief  
That shortens life in vain, and leave to God  
The welfare of His just, for in His own  
Good time He will make clear the vision. Come  
Thou, Thamar, let's away. (*Exeunt Esther and  
Thamar.*)

MARDOCHAI.

While idle sounds  
Of mirth arise, I'll to mine humble shrine,  
And pray for Israel, His chosen race. (*Exit.*)

## SCENE II.

Banquet hall of Assuerus. King, Haman, princes, nobles,  
guards, and slaves. Zethar and the seven eunuchs.

ASSUERUS.

Our glory hath been great before the world,  
And men have marveled at our power and wealth:

From India's diamond fields to distant hills  
Of swarth and golden Ethiop', a burst  
Of praise hath reached our ears.

HAMAN.

Great king,  
Thy bounty wins the hearts of all, and like  
A god thou holdest power!

ZETHAR.

Yet cannot cause  
The rain to fall, or flowers to garb the fields.

ASSUERUS.

Who dares to speak?

HAMAN.

An insult to our Lord,  
The king!

ZETHAR.

Nay, sire, restrain thine anger: it  
Was Zethar spoke.

ASSUERUS.

Peace, fool, lest thou my wrath  
Provoke.

HAMAN.

Beware, all ye who would o'erstep  
The patience of our worthy king; and, mark,  
The gibbet can uprear its awful head.

ZETHAR.

Aye well, and clasp the noblest head in its  
Embrace.

ADMATHA.

Enough! plague not the king with words.

CHARSENA.

Most gracious sire, thy feast is not complete,  
And pardon one who doth presume to ask  
The presence of our lovely queen, the kind  
And gentle Vasthi.

ALL.

Gracious sire, the queen.  
The queen!

ASSUERUS.

It pleaseth well our ears to hear  
The loyal cry. What, Mauman and Bazath!

BOTH.

Thy pleasure, sire.

ASSUERUS.

Go with thy trusted five  
Companions to great Persia's queen, and say  
Her lord and master wishes her to near  
The royal presence; bid her wear the crown  
Of empire on her brow that all may see  
The glory of our state.

BOTH.

Thy word, O king,  
Is law.

ASSUERUS.

We reign in peace o'er near the world;  
Twice three score provinces their wealth  
And homage yield to Persia's sceptre; vast  
And mighty is our sway.

HAMAN.

Above the kings  
Of earth thou holdest judgment.

CHARSENA.

But thy wise  
And most just laws do crown thy wondrous reign.

ASSUERUS.

Thy homage hath a balm for ills of state—  
But, peace, the slaves return. (*Enter Mauman,  
Bazath and others with downcast mien.*)

ALL.

The queen! the queen!

ASSUERUS.

What, knaves! do ye presume to come so far  
Advanced before our queen?

MAUMAN.

Most gracious sire,  
The royal Vasthi will not come.

ASSUERUS.

O death  
And furies! will not come? thou liest, slave!  
Thy head shall pay the price.

BAZATH.

'Tis true, great king,  
Our royal mistress spurned our words.

ASSUERUS.

Your words?

Nay, ours she spurned, and on her head the wrath  
Of Persia's king shall fall.

HAMAN.

O monstrous crime!

ASSUERUS.

Ye princes, how shall we doom Vasthi who  
Hath dared to scorn your king?

CHARSENA.

Tear from her brow  
The crown of state! she is unworthy her  
Great rank

ADMATHA.

And banish her from Persian lands.

HAMAN.

Most wise the counsel!

ASSUERUS.

Then we do decree  
That Vasthi, once our honored queen, be borne  
Beyond the hills that range their hoary heads  
In distant India; and thus our fame  
Will grow, that we who made her proudly great,  
Have in a word destroyed her power.

ALL.

Great

Is Assuerus, Persia's mighty king!

## ACT II.

## SCENE I.

Street of Susan before the palace gates. Procession singing the praises of Assuerus and Esther. Bogathan and Thares discuss their plot, which Mardochai overhears.

## CHORUS IN PRAISE OF ESTHER.

All hail to Persia's queen,  
Esther fairest queen;  
Weave garlands for her brow,  
Flowers to wreath her brow.

Her beauty made her queen,  
Hath crowned her Persia's queen;  
She ruleth o'er our hearts,  
Ruleth o'er our hearts.

May life and health attend  
Health the queen attend;  
Long may she live our queen,  
Esther fairest queen,  
Esther fairest queen.

*(Exit procession.)*

[Mardochai with bowed head stands near a pillar. Bogathan and Thares remain nearby.]

BOGATHAN.

'T is plain, good Thares, our right worthy king  
Upraiseth favorites as pleaseth his  
Most mighty will.

THARES *(loudly.)*

How now, Bogathan, dost  
'Thou murmur 'gainst thy lord?

[Mardochai becomes attentive.]

BOGATHAN.

Hush, madman! wouldst  
'Thou bring the guards about our heads? I speak  
But truly, for thou knowest well we have

Not ranked so high of late in Persia's eyes;  
 Forgotten are our deeds on Grecian shores,  
 And lauded is this Esther, scarcely known  
 Until today.

THARES.

Most true, Bogathan, yet  
 What can we do?

BOGATHAN (*slowly.*)

The slave and king are on  
 An equal footing when alone! (*Draws a dagger.*)

THARES.

What! kill  
 The king?

BOGATHAN.

A curse upon thee! hold thy tongue,  
 And let us to a safer place.

THARES.

'T is well,  
 For deeds of darkness shun the light of day.  
 (*Exeunt.*)

MARDOCHAI (*Comes forward.*)

Mine ears have heard the treason, and mine eyes  
 Have seen the traitors, as our Lord the God  
 Of Jacob hath designed! I'll to the queen. (*Exit.*)

## SCENE II.

King's apartment—King reclining on couch—Haman, Zethar,  
 attendants and scribes. Esther enters.

ASSUERUS.

Good morrow, Esther. Thou dost fairer grow  
 From day to day, and worthy more to be  
 Our queen.

ESTHER.

My lord the king hath pleasant words  
For Esther, and she fain would stay the speech  
She came to utter.

ASSUERUS (*bending forward.*)

What doth cause this fire  
To sparkle in thine eyes?

ESTHER.

Great king, thy life  
Is weighed by lowborn knaves; the balance hangs  
Upon thy word.

HAMAN.

Foul treason!

ASSUERUS.

What strange speech  
Is this? Hath Esther felt the burning breath  
Of traitors? Speak, and death shall cool their blood!

ESTHER.

In truth, I have, my lord; old Mardochai,  
A faithful subject hath o'erheard a plot  
To slay great Persia's king.

ASSUERUS.

Ye furies! speak  
Their names.

ESTHER.

Bogathan and swarth Thares have  
Conspired against thy life.  
(Haman starts, and turns aside.)

ASSUERUS.

My trusted slaves!  
By mighty Baal, they do laugh at death.  
What, Haman! straightway seize upon those dogs,  
And cause enquiry touching on their guilt;  
If traitors, make their fate a gruesome sign  
To impious eyes that I am king.

HAMAN (*bowed head.*)

A death  
To frighten fiends will be their lot.  
(*Exit with soldiers.*)

ZETHAR.

The slave,  
And not his knife, doth shed the blood.

ESTHER.

Most wise  
Thy words, but not o'erclear.

ASSUERUS.

What meanest thou  
By riddles to thy king?

ZETHAR.

Why punish but  
The senseless tools of ill? strike rather, king,  
The hand that holds them fast.

ASSUERUS (*contemptuously.*)

Enough, thou dolt,  
I weary of thy words.

ZETHAR.

In truth, I too,  
Begin to weary.

ASSUERUS.

Now, that we have stayed  
The trait'rous hand, we shall to state affairs  
Direct our thoughts. A kind farewell, my queen;  
Thou hast the heartfelt thanks of Persia's lord.  
Come, guards, attend.

*(Exeunt king and attendants.)*

ESTHER.

Thus God in kindness deals  
With Israel: but strange it is, the king  
O'erlooked leal Mardochai. Make note, ye scribes  
Of this event, and let the annals show  
His worth.

SCRIBES.

It shall be done, most gracious queen.

*(Exeunt Esther and maids.)*

## ACT III.

### SCENE I

Street of Susan—people passing—chorus in praise of Haman who passes with his retinue—Mardochai refuses to bend the knee.

#### CHORUS IN PRAISE OF HAMAN.

Haman hath served Persia's king,  
Princely hath the service been;  
Joyful we his praises sing,  
Happy that he praise doth win,  
And proud of his reward.  
And proud of his reward;  
We honor mighty Haman,  
And sing of his reward.

Bend the knee to Persia's prince;  
Haman is our mighty lord;  
Homage do to Persia's prince,  
For 't is thus that kings reward,

'T is thus that kings reward.  
'T is thus that kings reward,  
All glory then to Haman,  
For thus do kings reward.

(Procession halts. Admatha, leading a division, returns, and presents himself before Haman.)

HAMAN.

Admatha, why this long delay? who dares  
To stay our march of triumph?

ADMATHA.

Noble lord,  
The populace of Susan hath so thronged  
Our path that lowered spears can scarcely force  
Their way.

HAMAN.

Then bid our Macedonians  
To lead the van. (*Exit Admatha.*)

ZETHAR.

Against the loyal hearts  
Of Persia?

HAMAN (*angrily.*)

Peace, thou knave, and harken when  
Great Haman speaks.

ZETHAR.

'T is through a foolish love  
For kingly favorites they crowd the streets—  
But hark! is not that music to thine ears.

(*Chorus is heard singing the praises of Haman.*)

HAMAN.

Presume not rashly on thy clownish rank  
To chafe a prince. But, hold! Charsena, who  
Is yonder churl that stands with moody brow,  
Forgetting his obeisance?

CHARSENA.

Great my lord,  
'T is Mardochai the Jew whom Persia's king  
Hath looked upon with kindly eye.

HAMAN.

And now  
Forsooth, will brave our wrath. Down, stubborn Jew,  
Upon thy knees, and do me honor!

MARDOCHAI (*with folded arms.*)

Great  
Art thou, O Haman! but to God, the Lord  
of Abraham, alone I bend the knee  
In worship; thou'rt a man, though great of earth.

CHARSENA.

Thou insolent!

HAMAN.

Ha! Jew, thou pleadest well;  
I'm not a god, but mark! I can and will  
Take vengeance like a prince. Thou dog, kneel down!

MARDOCHAI

Old Mardochai doth honor thee as prince,  
But not as God.

CHARSENA.

A trait'rous knave.

HAMAN.

Ho, guards!  
Advance! Another day, thou Jewish churl,  
We shall exact thy homage.

ZETHAR (*lifting his hands in mock fear.*)

Spare us all!

## SCENE II.

Queen's apartments. Esther seated. Thamar and maids attending.

ESTHER.

Go, slave, and learn who waits without.

*(Exit maid.)*

THAMAR.

Mine eyes deceive me, if it be not thy  
Most trusted Athach.

ESTHER.

Strange that he should fear  
To enter.

THAMAR *(as Athach enters.)*

Aye, his brow is sad to read.

ESTHER.

Do thou command him hither—hold! he comes.  
What meaneth Athach in this mood before  
His queen?

ATHACH.

Great mistress, Athach hath just cause  
For woe, and Persia, too.

ESTHER *(starting forward.)*

Thy words betray  
A mighty sorrow.

ATHACH.

Gracious queen, hast thou  
Not heard the direful tidings? Why, methought  
The gentlest breeze that passed o'er Susan's mart  
Had whispered blood!

ESTHER.

What meanest thou? speak, slave!

ATHACH.

Alas, alas! an edict of the king  
Is posted high upon the palace gate,  
Condemning every Jew in Persia's land  
To cruel death!

ESTHER.

Oh, woe is me and mine!

THAMAR.

Most noble mistress!

ESTHER.

How hath Israel  
Offended thee, O Lord, that all should die?  
Woe, woe to Juda! who can now recall  
The fatal sentence since the king hath spoke!  
Old Mardochai hath seen aright, and with  
Prophetic vision hath long years ago  
Foretold our doom.

ATHACH.

Nay, noble mistress, thou  
Art still a queen.

THAMAR.

And wilt remain a queen.

ESTHER.

Perchance in your affections, faithful friends,  
But not in Persia's heart; the day my race

Is known, that day I die; yet not, to hold  
One instant more this fleeting state called life,  
Would Esther, if she could, deny the blood  
That courses thro' her veins.

ATHACH.

Most gracious queen,  
Thy words are strong with Judith's fire, and would  
Inflame plebeian blood. Would that the Jews  
Of Susan's streets might hear thy voice! methinks  
E'en Mardochai would hope.

ESTHER.

Leal Mardochai!  
Hast seen the honored Jew?

ATHACH.

He waits without  
The gate, and wears the sackcloth, while his locks  
Of gray disheveled sprinkle ashes at  
Each trembling step.

ESTHER.

Go, bid him enter by  
The secret path. 'Tis thus, O Thamar, that  
A king rewards a faithful race. Alas!  
The mockery of earthly pomp—a queen  
Today; tomorrow thrust from high estate,  
And scorned by all,—a people tried and true  
Are at a courtier's nod condemned to death!

(*Enter Mardochai and Athach.*)

Leal Mardochai, thy vision, then, was true.

MARDOCHAI.

Too true, great queen, and much I fear yet half  
Untold.

ESTHER.

Some petted flatterer at court,  
I ween, doth know the other half.

MARDOCHAI.

And who  
But Haman? He hath planned this wrong to glut  
His vengeance on old Mardochai. Go thou,  
Great queen, to Persia's king, and beg the boon  
Of our sad lives.

ESTHER.

Alas! poor Jew, thou dost  
Not know the king, nor Persia's laws: the one  
Is fixed as adamant, the other will  
Not change.

THAMAR.

Thy glance will melt the adamant;  
Thy word, transform the law.

ATHACH.

What can the king  
Deny thee?

MARDOCHAI.

Gracious queen, thy people cry  
To thee; their hope art thou, and if thou turn  
Deaf ear to their entreaty, hope is dead,  
And with that hope all Israel.

ESTHER.

Alas!  
Their hope is vain: weak Esther reigneth queen  
By favor, and her glory doth reflect

The might of Assuerus; she would fain  
Beseech the king, but feareth that his wrath  
Might spur our doom. Command all faithful Jews  
To don the sackcloth, and with ashes deck  
Their heads; pray to the Lord with fasts and tears  
To spare His wayward people, for our hope  
Is prayer, since prayer will summon God to our  
Assistance.

MARDOCHI.

God is mercy! (*Exeunt Mardochi and Athach.*)

ESTHER.

Come, ye maids.  
In sackcloth we shall dress our grief, and as  
With perfumed unguents of old Araby,  
Anoint with ashes penitent the head  
Of sorrow, while we weep our prayer to God.

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## ACT IV.

### SCENE I.

Haman's palace. Haman, Zares, Charsena, Admatha, Harbona, friends, guards, slaves, etc.

HAMAN.

Great is our power, vast our garnered wealth:  
To us the proudest noble bends the knee,  
And from our very shadow shrink in fear  
The wretches we have marked for wrath!

CHARSENA.

Great prince,  
We yield thee homage!

ZARES.

Gracious lord, thy wife  
And children worship thee; all Persia draws

New life and wisdom from thy master mind;  
Thro' thee the king doth reign.

HAMAN.

Nay, Zares, thou  
Must not deny the king his meed of praise;  
Do thou but name us Persia's arm of state,  
Our cup of glory will be filled.

ADMATHA.

Great prince,  
Humility may not conceal thy worth;

CHARSENA.

But doth emblazon virtue on each act.

ZARES.

Then, be thou hailed as Persia's strong right arm,  
That holdeth in its might the reins of law  
And justice.

ALL.

Great is Haman, Persia's strong  
Right arm!

HAMAN.

The king, most gracious master, hath  
Invited us to weigh affairs of state,  
And as a pledge of high authority,  
Hath given us his signet ring. (*Holds up the ring.*)

ADMATHA.

The seal  
Of royal power!

HAMAN.

And it seemeth good  
And just to us that traitors taste the draught  
Of ill they have prepared with cunning care  
For our vast empire.

CHARSENA.

Let them die!

ZARES.

I know  
Thy mind; the Jews are under sentence.

HAMAN.

And  
By Haman's all but royal power, they  
Shall perish root and branch!

ADMATHA.

Most wise and just  
The judgment.

CHARSENA.

Loyal prince!

HAMAN.

We have dispatched  
Our henchmen to the empire's distant bounds  
With copies of the royal edict signed  
By our own hand: our might is dreadful in  
Its wrath, for high in favor do we stand  
With Assuerus.

ZARES.

Mighty prince!

HAMAN.

The king  
Will on the morrow dine with Esther who  
Hath graciously invited us to sit  
At table with her lord—none else may come.

ADMATHA.

Thy rank o'ertoppeth all.

CHARSENA.

And from its proud  
And lofty eminence, like Asshur's wall,  
But looketh down on us to know its height  
And strength.

HAMAN.

Yet this is nothing, while that Jew  
Doth scorn and mock us with his moody brow—  
Doth taunt us with his pride Ye fiends! why have  
We born this insult! there, he sitteth, base  
And churlish Jew, and will not rise to do  
Us homage: yea, and standing, will not bend  
His knee.

ZARES.

The gibbet chokes such pride.

HAMAN.

The wretch  
Defied us to our face!

CHARSENA

Do thou command  
Thy slaves to rear a gibbet.

ADMATHA.

In the mart

Of Susan let it stand, that all may see  
The traitor's death.

ZARES.

Build fifty cubits high

That this same Jew may overlook at ease  
The city he had thought to scorn, for, in  
His pride, he hath mocked Susan when he mocked  
Her lord.

HAMAN.

Harbona, take ten slaves and build

A gibbet in the market place, and rear  
Its beam full fifty cubits high, and on  
Its dizzy height hang Mardochai.

HARBONA.

It shall

Be done, my lord. (*Exit with slaves.*)

CHARSENA.

Not Mardochai who saved

The king?

ADMATHA.

And lives by royal favor?

HAMAN.

Aye,

The same, and though the king doth be displeased,  
That Jew shall die! Ah, Mardochai, the wrath  
Of Persia's greatest prince shall make thy fate  
A dreadful warning to all stubborn slaves,  
And teach the world that Haman rules this land!

## SCENE II.

King's apartment. Assuerus on a couch. Zethar, sentinels, slaves, &c.

ASSUERUS.

Our wearied brain doth vainly seek surcease,  
From cares of state, but strangely wayward sleep  
Hath oft this night refused to welcome us,  
A king, to its oblivion; we must  
Abide the fates; yet 't is most hard to win  
Repose, and not enjoy its fruits.

ZETHAR.

Great king,  
Canst thou not summon sleep?

ASSUERUS.

Ha, fool, the mock  
Is ever on thy lips! Bid Mauman and Bazath  
Attend us. (*Exit Zethar.*)

Great, indeed, yet like a child,  
When wrestling with the mighty force  
That nature owns; yea, we are king of men,  
In that we hold their wills subservient  
To our behest; we grasp the reins, and guide  
Their course to our appointed goal; their strength  
Becomes our own; but nature spurns our rule,  
Disdaining earthly masters.

(*Enter Mauman, Bazath and Zethar.*)

MAUMAN.

Gracious lord,  
Thy slaves await thy pleasure.

ASSUERUS.

Mauman, canst  
Thou lay on kingly eyes the balm of sleep?

MAUMAN.

Most gracious sire, if this poor life could buy  
The majesty of Persia but a moment's ease,  
Then cheap would be the price.

ASSUERUS.

Alas! not all  
The lives in Persia would suffice.

BAZATH.

Great king,  
Thy servant may command the royal scribes  
To bring the annals of the kingdom, and  
Recount to thee the glories of thy reign:  
'T will soothe thy soul.

ASSUERUS.

Wise are thy words:  
Go, call the scribes.

BAZATH.

My lord, they are near by:  
Thy servant hath presumed to know thy will,  
And brought them hither.

*(Scribes come forward. Bazath retires.)*

ASSUERUS.

Read, ye slaves, the acts  
Of our most prosperous reign. *(Scribes read.)*

True, Mardochai  
Hath saved our life; read, slave, the passage once  
Again.

SCRIBE.

And Mardochai discovereth  
A plot to slay the king: Bogathan and  
False Thares are found guilty—

ASSUERUS.

What reward  
Hath Mordochai received? (*Bazath returns.*)

MAUMAN.

None suited to the deed.

ASSUERUS.

What counsellors have we! who standeth in  
The Court?

BAZATH.

Great King, the princely Haman hath  
But now appeared.

ASSUERUS.

Call Haman hither: strange,  
That loyal servants should so find their king  
Ungrateful. (*Enter Haman and Bazath.*)

Haman, how shall we give grace  
And honor unto one we would exalt  
Above his fellowmen?

ZETHAR. (*Mockingly.*)

Spare not thy words,  
Great Haman, for perchance—

ASSUERUS.

Peace, fool, thy tongue  
Doth wag too freely.

HAMAN

Sire, the man whom thou  
Desireth to exalt, shall wear thy robes,

And seated on the horse thou ridest, shall  
Go forth in Susan, bearing on his head  
Thy royal crown, while Persia's noblest prince  
Shall lead the horse and cry aloud: Thus shall  
Be honored he whom Assuerus hath  
A mind to honor.

ASSUERUS.

Thou hast apoken well;  
Make haste, take robe and horse and crown, and do  
This same to Mardochai, the Jew. (*Haman starts.*)  
Take heed  
That thou fulfill thy words! (*Haman's head droops.*)

HAMAN.

It shall be done.

ZETHAR.

Great king, a wisdom not thine own hath framed  
Thy speech, and measured with thy royal lips  
The meed of justice.

ASSUERUS.

Ha, the jester hath  
Become a courtly censor, seeing good  
Or evil in our judgment, as his sense  
Of duty prompteth! Yet, 't is fitting that  
The fool break silence when the wise hath fear  
To speak; nor is the fool more foolish that  
He voices truth; for many knaves are wise  
To human thought, who hold their peace when they  
Should speak; and thus the fool may teach the wise,  
And by his folly shame the knave. Away,  
Ye cringing slaves! we'll to the court of state  
To learn more wisdom, though we may not teach.

## ACT V.

## SCENE I.

Queen's apartment. Esther in sackcloth. Mardochai. Athach  
Thamar and Maids.

ESTHER.

These days of tears and fasting have o'erhung  
Our spirit like a pall; woe beareth down  
With leaden weight; the future lowereth dark  
Upon our sight. Alas, poor Israel,  
My thrice unhappy race!

THAMAR.

Fair mistress, thou  
Hast lived the queen, and--

ESTHER.

Canst not die the queen?  
Aye, if the Lord so willeth.

THAMAR.

Nay, nay, speak  
Not so despairingly.

ESTHER.

We thought to seek  
The king, but fear hath stood his sentinel,  
And frightened us away.

MARDOCHAI.

Ah, Esther, must  
Thy people walk like sheep unto the house  
Of slaughter, while thou holdest in thy hand  
A royal sceptre? Go unto the king  
With our complaint, that we may live; permit  
Not chosen Israel to perish from  
The earth.

ATHACH.

Great queen, turn ear to our request,  
And save thy people.

ESTHER.

How may we approach  
The majesty of Persia; has he not  
Decreed that all who dare draw near the throne  
And find no welcome, seek their death?

MARDOCHAI.

Trust thou  
In God; let duty stifle fear.

ESTHER.

Did not  
The king reward thee but a day ago?  
Perchance, he would grant thee this grace.

MARDOCHAI.

A puff  
Of smoke, and gone as quickly. Nay, the king  
Hath paid me once, and that the last.

ESTHER.

Hast thou  
Forgotten Mardochai, that Persia's laws  
Can not be changed: the sentence hath been passed.  
The doom is fixed.

MARDOCHAI.

The God of Abraham  
Doth work His will despite the word of man;  
'T is not for us to question how He may  
Avert our fate; we know He can, if He  
So willeth.

ESTHER.

And hath Esther not this faith?  
Hath she not cast aside her pride of rank  
To wear the sackcloth? hath she not with tears  
Besought the Lord to stay this stroke of wrath?  
If God doth will that Esther tempt her death  
In pleading for her race, she hath no fear.

MARDOCHAI.

God willeth so, for Mardochai doth ask  
The favor.

ESTHER.

Nay, how so?

MARDOCHAI.

Remember thy  
Estate; thou wert not born to queenly rank,  
But won thy life beneath the captive's roof,  
And when thy parents died, old Mardochai  
Received from God the precious charge of thy  
Young life.

ESTHER. (*Weeping.*)

Aye, Mardochai, thou canst command:  
Thy message is from God.

MARDOCHAI.

Array thyself  
In royal robes; wear all thy richest gems,  
And on thy brow bear Persia's crown of state:  
Then fearlessly approach the king with thy  
Request. God gave thee beauty: use it now  
To save His chosen race.

THAMAR.

And may He give  
Thee strength.

## ATHACH.

And may He stay the king's right arm,  
To spare thee to the land.

## ESTHER.

Oh God, my Lord  
And King, have mercy on thy people; we  
Have sinned in giving worship to strange gods,  
But now repent: behold our tears, and let  
Them wash away our guilt; have pity, Lord  
Upon poor Esther who doth bear the sins  
Of her unhappy race; be thou her strength,  
For she doth take her danger in her hands.  
Let not the wicked triumph, but confuse  
Their counsels; train her speech that she may tame  
The lion, and bring peace and safety to  
Thy chosen race. Go, Thamar, and prepare  
Our richest robes; thou, Mardochai, command  
The Jews of Susan to beseech the Lord that grace  
May meet their queen before the Persian throne.

## SCENE II.

Assuerus seated on his throne, surrounded by royal guards, Haman Admatha, Charsena, Zethar, Bazath, Harbona and nobles, slaves, etc.

## ASSUERUS.

Long hath the light of empire filled our reign  
With its refulgence; brighter day by day  
Our glory shineth, cheering with benign  
And warming rays the multitude who call  
Us lord; till now the noontide splendor of  
Our royal sway hath reached most distant lands  
Beyond the sacred Ganges, and in scorn  
Of space hath caught reflection where unknown

And savage tribes look eastward to the course  
Of that mysterious and wondrous Nile.

HAMAN.

Thy words, great king, have meaning, and the truth  
Doth make them clear.

ADMATHA.

Thy subjects are thy friends:  
Thy foes are dead, or living, they must die.

CHARSENA.

And how may traitors live, when even friends  
Who seek unbidden welcome from their king,  
Seek death.

HAMAN.

Dread is the majesty, in truth,  
That we behold. Great king, thy glance would kill,  
If sent in wrath against thy servant.

ZETHAR.

Then take heed  
Thou call it not, for oft it darteth ere  
Offense is ripe.

HAMAN. (*starts: then laughs.*)

Ha, fool, thou dreamest now  
Of fruitful fields and budding trees: thy thoughts  
Become a husbandman more than a slave  
At court.

ZETHAR.

My thoughts when strong ring louder far  
In princely ears than mid the silent trees.

ASSUERUS.

What, knaves! how dare ye pass the mock before  
Our royal throne?

HAMAN. (*prostrating.*)

Thy pardon, sire.

ZETHAR.

When I  
Have sinned, I'll sue for pardon.

ASSUERUS.

Peace, thou fool!

(*Enter Esther with Thamar and maid. All start in alarm.*)

ALL.

The queen! the queen!

ZETHAR.

Woe, woe to Persia.

(*Queen advances.*)

HAMAN.

Death  
To all who scorn the mandates of our king!

(*Guards advance with leveled spears.*)

ASSUERUS.

Hold, slaves! 't is Esther, Persia's queen!

(*Guards stand with leveled spears.*)

ADMATHA.

Back, guards,  
The king commands!

ASSUERUS, (*leaving his throne.*)

Rise, Esther, thou hast found  
Rare favor in our sight. Fear nothing, when the king  
Doth bid thee welcome.

ESTHER.

Save me from thy wrath.

ASSUERUS.

Fear not, our Esther, thou wert born to rule  
The royal heart of Persia; laws that bind  
Both prince and peasant were not made for thee:  
Behold, the sceptre falleth at thy word,  
And pledgeth thee both life and power. What  
Dost thou desire of Assuerus?

ESTHER.

Spare,  
O king, thy faithful servant, Mardochai!

ASSUERUS.

Thy wish is granted, and, in truth, if thou  
Hadst asked for half my kingdom, 't were  
This moment thine. But how hath Mardochai  
Offended?

ESTHER.

Gracious king, he is a Jew,  
And by decree must die; my father was  
His brother, and my name Edissa ere  
I wore the crown; he reared me as his child;  
Unknowing, thou didst choose me as thy queen,  
And now hast doomed all Jews and me to death!

ASSUERUS.

By mighty Asshur! by great Baal, thou  
Shalt live!

ESTHER.

But thy decree can not be changed;  
The fatal edict hath gone forth to all  
Thy provinces.

ASSUERUS.

Aye, true, our word must not  
Be changed, yet we can make the bearers of  
That bloody mandate but the victims of  
Their cruel zeal. We do remember that  
The Jews were sentenced as foul traitors to  
Their king. Who hath procured this doom?  
(*Haman shrinks back.*)

ESTHER.

My Lord,  
Yon guilty wretch, to glut his hate, hath done  
The deed—the proud and heartless Haman!

ASSUERUS.

Ha,  
Thou cursed knave, we mind now of thy words  
Against the Jews, as if so fearful for  
Our royal life.

HAMAN (*Kneeling.*)

My lord and king, thy wrath  
Is just. Oh, spare a wretched slave!

HARBONA.

Behold,  
Great king, this cruel prince hath made me build  
A gibbet fifty cubits high to hang  
The faithful Jew, old Mardochai.

ASSUERUS.

Upon

It hang the traitor, Haman.

HAMAN.

Mercy, oh,

My master, mercy !

ASSUERUS.

Wretch, dost thou now plead  
For mercy ? Guards, away ! (*Haman borne away.*)

ZETHAR.

And thus doth fall  
The fruit of pride which long hath ripened to  
Its rottenness.

ASSUERUS.

The knave, forsooth, would soon  
Aspire to reign, when he could foully hunt  
To death so many of our friends. What, ho !  
Bazath, go summon Mardochai unto  
Our presence.

ESTHER. (*Kneeling.*)

Gracious king, my people then  
Shall live ?

ASSUERUS.

Aye, live they shall.

ESTHER.

O God, Thou hast  
Been Esther's grace.

(*Enter Bazath and Mardochai.*)

BAZATH.

Great master, Mardochai  
Awaiteth thy good will.

ASSUERUS.

It doth appear,  
Leal Jew, thou art our kinsman, and to warm  
The ties of blood, we now declare thee prince  
Of Persia; on thy hand we place in trust  
Our signet ring, that thou shall henceforth be  
Our second self.

ALL.

Hail, Mardochai ! Thrice hail,  
Our noble prince !

ASSUERUS

And, furthermore, we do  
Decree that letters shall be sent to all  
Our provinces, from India's distant mounts  
To dusky Ethiopia, that on  
The thirteenth day of Adar, every Jew  
Shall seize the sword, and slay the henchmen of  
The fallen Haman; thus shall traitors drink  
A draught from their own cup.

MARDOCHAI.

Thy servant will obey,  
But thou dost honor him o'ermuch.

ASSUERUS.

Thy honor is our own, and giving thee  
Reward, is but rewarding Persia's king.  
Come, Esther, faithful queen, and share our throne  
Of state; thy God hath triumphed o'er our foes,  
And Assuerus shall in safety reign  
With Mardochai to counsel as his mind,  
And Esther, fairest queen, to rule his heart.

## MARDOCHAI.

The vision now is clear; the dragons must  
Yet meet and fight; the tiny rivulet  
Already hath become a royal stream;  
The light of Israel doth fill the world,  
And God hath raised the humble from their place  
Of lowliness; the proud have perished from  
His sight; thus doth He bide all human ill,  
For in His time He turneth ill to good.

*Curtain.*







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